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ABSTRACT

Value orientations of members of younger and older age strata in 2 subcultural systems--one urban and one rural--are examined. The author looks at age stratification in a vertical sense (i.e., assessing differences existing between members of younger and older age strata), as well as in a horizontal sense (i.e., comparing the value orientations of younger urban persons with those of younger rural persons, and those of older urban persons with those of older rural persons. Structured interviews were used to collect data from 805 persons who comprised probability samples of men and women ages 20-29 and ages 60 and over living in the selected settings. Although findings varied-across variables, essentially differences were revealed between the younger and older age strata in both geographic areas on such value orientations as authoritarianism, dependency, achievement, religiosity, and anomia. Age strata differences are viewed as reflecting social and technological change. Some implications of this social change hypothesis are offered. (Author/TL)

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AGE STRATIFICATION AND VALUE ORIENTATIONS

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AGE STRATIFICATION AND VALUE ORIENTATIONS[1/]

The concept of age stratification developed by Riley and Foner (1968) provides an approach useful to researchers and practitioners concerned with the social psychological aspects of human aging. Age stratification, similar to other forms of social stratification, includes properties of central values and norms, of distinctive life styles, and of inequalities in property, prestige, and power. However, age stratification phenomena possess unique characteristics which provide possibilities for predicting the emerging nature of American society.

In contrast to the upward and downward social mobility common to the American class system, movement through age strata is universal, unidirectional, and irreversible. Members of younger age strata, if they survive, become members of older age strata. Although younger and older age cohorts live in the same society, the experiences of the formative years differ as a reflection of technological and social change. In a rapidly changing society, such as the United States, younger age cohorts may internalize basic value orientations substantially different from those of their elders, and even from those of cohorts only a few years older. Successive age cohorts, in turn, both reflect and forecast changing value systems. Thus data on

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value orientations of younger and older age strata can offer some clues about society of the future.

The concept of age stratification also provides a useful means of understanding subcultural systems. These systems abound in the United States. They possess elements of continuity and elements of change. Comparisons of the characteristics of age strata existing in two or more subcultural systems can provide useful information for researchers and practitioners in social gerontology. Unless practitioners possess intimate knowledge of subcultural systems of behavior, their programs and services for the aged may be seriously handicapped. In addition, knowledge of age strata differences in subcultural systems can serve to prevent the danger of formulating plans and policies for only the present generation of the aged. Practitioners must make judgments about the suitability of their programs for future cohorts of the aged.

This paper examines value orientations of age strata in two subcultural systems--one urban and the other rural. The first objective is to look at age stratification in a vertical sense--to assess differences in value orientations existing between members of younger and older age strata in the two subcultural systems. A second objective is to look at age stratification in a horizontal sense--to compare the value orientations of younger urban persons with those of younger rural persons, and to compare the value orientations of older urban persons with those of older rural people. A third objective is to offer some interpretations of the differences found and to suggest some implications for successive age cohorts in the two geographic areas.

METHODS

In 1969, data were collected by means of structured interviews from 805 persons who comprised probability samples of men and women aged 20 to 29 and 60 and over living in a rural county of the Southern Appalachian Region and in a metropolitan center located outside of the Region.[2/] The metropolitan center had a population of about 150,000 and the rural county of about 6,500. City blocks in the urban center and small areas of land in the rural county constituted the sampling units and these were selected according to a table of random numbers to yield approximately 400 cases from each residential area. The urban sample included 237 younger and 165 older persons, and the rural sample included 127 younger and 276 older men and women. No institutionalized persons were included.

All homes in each city block and in each area of rural land in the sample were visited by an interviewer to obtain information from persons in the two stipulated age groups. If a prospective respondent was not at home on the first visit, an appointment was made for a subsequent interview. If more than one person in the same household were to be interviewed, special effort was made to guarantee independent responses. In most cases each respondent in a household was interviewed alone. In the few cases where this was impossible, the interview with

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one person was completed before another was started. The questions which elicited information for this report were interspersed throughout a 15-page interview schedule.

The respondents were almost entirely of the Protestant faith, predominantly married, and predominantly white, except for the eight percent Negro in the urban center. About one-third of the older persons were widowed. Women outnumbered men in the samples by a ratio of six to four. In both residential areas, the younger age groups, compared with the older, had received more formal education, had higher incomes, and had greater representation in the professional and white collar occupations. The median years of formal education of the younger and older aged persons in the city were 13.8 and 10.1, respectively, and in the rural area, 11.1 and 7.8, respectively. In the urban center, the median annual incomes of its younger and older persons were $6,015 and $3,885, respectively, and in the rural county, $3,999 and $1,773, respectively. The younger generations revealed greater geographic mobility in their backgrounds than did the older age groups. The oldest person interviewed was 93, and the median age of the older persons was 69. About two-fifths of the older people considered themselves retired.

The term "value orientation" refers to a complex of knowledge, belief, attitudes, and values by which a person or group expresses ways of looking at a situation (Anderson, 1964). Value orientations were assessed by presenting each respondent with three statements about selected institutions and values in American society, such as authoritarianism, dependency, achievement, religion, and despair and pessimism. Respondents gave an "agree," "don't know," or a "disagree"

answer to each statement. These responses were scored one, two, and three, respectively permitting a mean score range from three to nine for each set. The lower the score, the stronger the belief in or adherence to the value orientation. Intercorrelations among statements on each scale ranged from .74 to .97 with a mean correlation of .87, indicating that the items in each set did assess a common underlying dimension.

FINDINGS

Nine scales were used to assess value orientations, and procedures permitted a possible score range of three to nine on each scale, with the low score indicating the stronger adherence to the value orientation. In the urban area, younger and older age strata differed significantly on eight of the nine value orientations, and in the rural area the two age strata differed significantly on six. In both geographic areas, the older persons revealed stronger support to the value orientations than did the younger persons. In the urban area, the younger age strata scores showed a wider range than did those of the older age group, but in the rural area the ranges were the same for both age groups. In the urban center, the mean scores on the eight scales of significant difference were 5.71 for the younger age stratum and 4.63 for the older age group, and the respective ranges in mean scores were 4.82 to 7.20 and 4.04 to 6.32. In the rural area, the mean scores on the six scales of significant difference were 4.74 for the younger and 4.28 for the old age strata, and the respective ranges in mean scores were 3.85 to 5.96 and 3.47 to 5.58.

Authoritarianism. Four aspects of authoritarian orientations were assessed in this study: (1) beliefs that schools and colleges should be more strict, should constrain the freedoms of youth, and should place more emphasis on training for vocations; (2) beliefs that young people should spend more time working and less time running around, should face up to the real problems of life, and should not get all the good things in life too easily; (3) beliefs that the husband should play the dominant role in the family, such as pay the bills, make repairs around the house, and not be required to do the dishes; and (4) (Adorno, 1950) beliefs that young people should have more respect for authority, that personal matters should not be pried into, and that young people basically like to have definite rules to follow.

Responses to the foregoing statements related to authoritarianism revealed substantial differences between younger and older age strata in the two geographic areas. In the urban center, the younger age group was significantly less authoritarian than the older age group on three of the four measures. The mean value orientation scores of the younger and older age groups in the urban community were, respectively; for schools 6.05 and 4.38 ($T = 8.33$, $P < .001$), youth behavior 5.77 and 4.16 ($T = 8.27$, $P < .001$), and respect for authority 4.83 and 4.04 ($T = 5.31$, $P < .001$), the lower score indicating the stronger adherence to the value orientation. No significant difference was found between younger and older age groups in the urban area on husband dominance in the home, the respective mean scores being 5.76 and 5.78.

In the rural Southern Appalachia area, age strata differences in authoritarianism followed a similar pattern, but the differences were of

less magnitude. The mean value orientation scores of the younger and older rural age groups were, respectively, schools 4.15 and 3.61 ($T = 3.49$, $P < .001$), youth behavior 3.85 and 3.47 ($T = 2.75$, $P < .001$), and husband dominance in the home 5.65 and 5.34 ($T = 2.79$, $P < .001$). No significant difference was found between younger and older age strata in the rural area on respect for authority, the respective mean scores being 4.19 and 4.11.

The data indicate that authoritarianism is more pronounced in the rural area studied than in the metropolitan center. The younger age group in the rural area scored significantly higher than the younger age persons in the urban center on three of the four measures of authoritarianism. The mean value orientation scores of the younger age strata in the urban and rural areas were, respectively: for schools 6.05 and 4.15 ($T = 8.91$, $P < .001$), youth behavior 5.77 and 3.85 ($T = 9.20$, $P < .001$), and respect for authority 4.83 and 4.19 ($T = 3.91$, $P < .001$). No significant difference was found between urban and rural younger persons on husband dominance in the family, the respective mean scores being 5.76 and 5.75.

The older age group in the rural area also scored significantly higher than the older age men and women in the urban center on three of the four scales on authoritarianism. The mean scores of the older age strata in the urban and rural areas were, respectively, for schools 4.38 and 3.61 ($T = 5.08$, $P < .001$), youth behavior 4.16 and 3.47 ($T = 5.06$, $P < .001$), and husband dominance in the home 5.78 and 5.34 ($T = 4.27$, $P < .001$). Older persons in the urban and rural areas did

not differ significantly in their scores on respect for authority, the means being 4.04 and 4.24, respectively.

Dependency. Two measures of dependency were included in this study. One assessed dependency on one's family, such as beliefs and attitudes that a person should always give financial help to his relatives if they are in need, that a person should be able to count on financial support from his family and relatives if he needs it, and that a person should always ask the advice of his immediate family before making any decisions. A second set of statements assessed dependency on government, such as beliefs that the government should make every effort to increase welfare payments to people who need it, that the government should provide a job to everyone who wants one, and that the government should provide free food for families in need.

In the urban center, the younger age group revealed greater independence than the older age group on both measures, the mean scores being, respectively, on family dependency 6.12 and 5.13 ($T = 4.84$, $P < .001$) and on government dependency 5.20 and 4.53 ($T = 3.57$, $P < .001$). In the rural area, the younger age stratum compared with the older age stratum revealed greater independence in relation to their families, the mean scores being, respectively, 4.72 and 4.11 ($T = 3.31$, $P < .001$). However, the two age groups in the rural area did not differ significantly in their dependence on government, the mean scores being, respectively, 4.06 and 3.89.

Feelings of dependency appeared to be stronger in the rural than in the urban area. But younger and older age strata in the rural area revealed stronger feelings of dependency than did their counterparts

in the urban centre. The mean value orientation scores of the younger age strata in the urban and rural areas were, respectively, family dependency 6.12 and 4.72 ($T = 6.77$, $P < .001$) and dependency on government 5.20 and 4.06, ($T = 6.38$, $P < .001$). The mean value orientation scores of the older age strata in the urban and rural areas were, respectively, family dependency 5.13 and 4.11 ($T = 5.64$, $P < .001$).

Achievement. Orientations toward achievement were evaluated from responses to three statements: "an ambitious and hard working person can always get ahead in the world, people who are at the top of the success ladder deserve to be there , (and) with effort and ability any person has a good chance of becoming an outstanding success."

Responses to these three statements revealed significant differences between the age strata in the urban center but not in the rural area. Younger persons in the metropolitan center registered significantly less agreement with the idea of achievement than did their elders, the mean scores being, respectively, 4.82 and 4.24 ($T = 3.58$, $P < .001$). In the rural area, the younger age group revealed slightly stronger achievement orientations than did the older group, but the differences were not statistically significant: 4.50 and 4.81, respectively ($T = -1.88$, $P > .05$).

Subscription to the value orientation of achievement was significantly stronger among the older age stratum in the city than among the older stratum in the rural area of the Southern Appalachian Region. The mean scores of the older age strata in the urban and rural areas were, respectively, 4.24 and 4.81 ($T = -3.61$, $P < .001$).

No significant difference was found between urban and rural younger persons in their adherence to achievement orientations, the mean scores being, respectively, 4.82 and 4.50 ($T = 1.88$, $P > .05$).

Religiosity. Religious orientations were assessed from responses to three statements: "In the final analysis, religion is the only thing a person can really count on. There is a Divine plan and purpose for every living thing. The Bible is God's word and all it says is True."

In both geographic areas, the younger age strata revealed significantly less religiosity than did the older age strata. In the urban center, the respective mean scores for the younger and older age groups were 5.70 and 4.25 ($T = 6.90$, $P < .001$), and in the rural area, 4.09 and 3.57 ($T = 3.52$, $P < .001$). Both younger and older age groups in the Southern Appalachian Region sample evidenced significantly stronger adherence to religiosity than did their counterparts in the metropolitan center. The mean scores of the younger urban and rural persons were, respectively, 5.70 and 4.09 ($T = 7.39$, $P < .001$) and of the older urban and rural persons, 4.25 and 3.57 ($T = 4.26$, $P < .001$).

Anomia. Feelings of pessimism and despair were identified by means of responses to three statements adapted from an anomia scale designed by Srole (1956). The statements were "In spite of what some people say, the life of the average man today is getting worse, not better. Nowadays, a person has to live for today and let tomorrow take care of itself. There is little use in writing public officials because they are not really interested in the problems of the average man."

The younger age persons in both urban and rural areas were significantly less pessimistic than their elders. In the urban center, the mean anomia scores of younger and older age strata were, respectively, 7.20 and 6.32 ($T = 4.26$, $P < .001$), and in the rural area, respectively, 5.96 and 5.58 ($T = 2.00$, $P < .05$). Younger and older age strata in the rural area were significantly more pessimistic than the younger and older persons living in the metropolitan center. The mean anomia scores of the younger urban and rural persons were, respectively, 7.20 and 5.96 ($T = 6.09$, $P < .001$), and of the older urban and rural persons 6.32 and 5.58 ($T = 3.73$, $P < .001$).

DISCUSSION

The foregoing findings on value orientations of two age strata in two subcultural systems suggest an important question. How may the differences be explained? Two hypotheses appear relevant. One is that the differences is value orientations existing between older and younger age groups may be interpreted to represent changes in people as they age. Comparative studies of age groups are popular in social gerontology, and differences found are often implicitly or explicitly suggested to be part of the aging process. Such interpretations provide a simple explanation. With the passage of time, younger people will grow up and mature to be like their elders. Thus each generation can predict with considerable accuracy the values of succeeding generations, and a highdegree of stability and security can be anticipated in society.

Unfortunately such an interpretation seems to encounter difficulties. One example germane to social gerontology serves to

illustrate this problem. Proponents of disengagement theory (Cumming and Henry, 1961) compared younger and older persons and concluded that the normal process of human aging involved an inevitable and a universal severance of relationships with others. Critics of the theory (Maddox, 1964; Rose and Peterson, 1965; and Youmans, 1969) pointed out that alleged disengagement in later life is not necessarily inevitable nor universal, and that a major weakness in the theory is failure to give adequate attention to societal changes.

A second hypothesis is that the differences in value orientations existing between older and younger age strata ~~is~~ are a reflection of social change. The younger age strata included in the samples, born in the decade 1940 to 1950, undoubtedly internalized value orientations different from those of the older-aged persons born before 1910. It is probably a safe assumption to say that an age cohort will maintain substantial continuity in the values they internalized and "crystalized" (Mannheim, 1952) during their formative years. Psychiatrists and clinical psychologists offer abundant evidence of the extreme difficulties encountered in their attempts to change basic beliefs of their patients. Several social scientists suggest that socialization after the formative years is concerned mainly with overt behavior and not with basic values, and that society is unwilling to incur the high cost of redirecting the basic values of adults (Brim and Wheeler, 1966; Rosow, 1967).

It is recognized that some modifications in values will occur in any age cohort as it moves through the life course. However, the

nature of such changes is difficult to ascertain. Only longitudinal studies of the same persons over periods of time can determine the modifications that take place. Few longitudinal studies have been made in social gerontology, principally because they are extremely difficult and expensive.

One longitudinal study directly related to the issue at hand may be cited. In 1955-1957, a research team of physiologists, medical clinicians, psychiatrists, psychologists, and sociologists examined a broad range of biological, attitudinal, and behavioral characteristics of 47 healthy older men whose mean age was 71 years (Birren et al, 1963). In 1967, a follow-up of this group of men provided an opportunity to replicate some of the analyses used in the earlier study and to obtain a limited "longitudinal" view of human aging. The findings in the follow-up study showed that the elderly men gave evidence of a high degree of stability in their activities, relationships, attitudes, and general outlook on life. Some changes did occur among the men but these did not suggest a systematic shift toward the less favorable characteristics (Youmans and Yarrow, 1971).

The age strata differences in value orientations and the interpretation of these differences to be a reflection of social and technological changes in American society have important implications for researchers and practitioners in social gerontology. The data presented here offer some clues about the nature of emerging society. The values and beliefs of the older age group probably exemplify the traditional or folk culture which may be passing out of existence

(Lerner, 1958). In contrast, the values of the younger age group probably reflect the emerging society and may constitute what Boulding (1969) calls a newer supercultural system. This nascent cultural system appears to be composed of succeeding age groups who tend to be more urbane and sophisticated, more knowledgeable and better informed, more liberal and tolerant, and more secular and independent than preceding age groups. It is probably a safe prediction to say that many problems of American society will revolve around the tensions and stresses generated between the traditional and the emerging value systems.

The findings in this study suggest a widespread anti-authoritarian and independency trend in the two geographic areas, more pronounced in the urban than in the rural area. The significantly weaker support for authoritarian values evidenced by the younger age group in comparison with their elders suggest an emerging value system inconsistent with the structure of large-scale industrial and governmental organizations which characterize the corporate state. Every age tends to develop organizational forms appropriate to its needs, and perhaps the prevailing forms of bureaucratic structure are undergoing change (Bennis, 1970).

This study suggests the hypothesis that the metropolitan environment is producing younger generations who are disenchanted with opportunities for achieving success in American society. The apparent eroding of a work ethos in the metropolitan center would suggest that an increasing value is being placed on "nonwork" or "leisure"

identifications. It can be inferred that successive generations in the urban environment will probably develop a "mixing" of leisure and work components.

The orientations toward work values in the urban center studied have important implications for many middle and older age persons in that area. An increased emphasis upon leisure pursuits with a decline in work values may result in a smoother and less abrupt transition from work to retirement life for increasing proportions of older aged persons. In addition, the emerging attitudes and values toward work may serve to facilitate the shortening of the work week and the earlier retirement of persons in the urban area. Some older age persons, on the other hand, may find themselves in conflict with these emerging trends. Those older aged persons who share the traditional dedication to the work ethic and who may want to work may have difficulty in finding employment. One economist (Spengler, 1969) points out that employment opportunities for the aged will probably be even less satisfactory from 1970 to 2000 than they were in 1960.

The data in this study suggest the possibility that pessimism and hopelessness may be of declining importance in the areas studied. Such negative feelings no doubt may increase with the onset of old age, but only longitudinal studies of the same persons over extended periods of time can conclusively demonstrate the degree to which this occurs. It is inferred that once younger people surpass the disruptive stage of adolescence and are launched in their occupational and family careers they will have access to the means of achieving their life goals. Succeeding age cohorts, in turn, probably will emerge who are

less pessimistic than their predecessors.

It can be inferred from the age group differences in values presented that successive age groups will probably live in a society of decreasing primary and sacred values and increasing secular ones. It is generally recognized that primary values and beliefs have been instrumental to families in providing care and emotional support for older persons. With a decline in primary and sacred values, aged persons probably will receive less attention and care from their families and more from secondary public sources.

A decline in primary support values for the aged probably will influence successive aged groups to fall back on their own resources. Persons who enter the old-age category in the future in the two geographic areas probably will be motivated to form a more distinctive subculture with a stronger sense of group identity than exists at present. The growth of an aging subculture (Rose and Peterson, 1965) will provide a means of social and psychological support for the aged and will enable them to form stronger pressure groups. The increased knowledge and sophistication, the higher educational level, the improved health and economic conditions of succeeding cohorts of the aged will enable them to resist vigorously against the inequalities imposed upon them. They will have greater access to the means of uniting in action to win public support for benefits. These societal trends undoubtedly will focus private and public attention on a salient issue in American society--that is, what criteria should be used in determining the portion of goods and services to be diverted for the benefit of the aged population?

The differences in values and beliefs existing between the rural and the urban residents in this study require some explanation and probably have some implications for the future. It appears that both older and younger age groups in the samples from the Southern Appalachian Region, compared with their counterparts in the metropolitan center, were more authoritarian in their views, more fundamentalistic in religious outlook, less motivated toward achievement, more closely identified with their families, evidence a greater dependency on government, and revealed greater hopelessness and despair.

These subcultural differences in values and beliefs no doubt reflect the conditions of rural life in the Southern Appalachian Region. It is commonly assumed that the rural aged enjoy advantages such as abundant fresh air and sunshine, work and activities out-of-doors, a simplicity of life which moves at a slower pace, and the emotional supports of close family and friends.

This idyllic picture of rural America has been created mainly by popular writers,just as the idealized version of the American cowboy has been implanted in the consciousness of America by Eastern novelists. The glorification of rural life does not appear to stand the test of careful scrutiny either in the distant past or in contemporary twentieth century industrialized America. Euripides, the popular dramatist of ancient Greece, who lived from 480 to 406 B.C., appeared aware of the disadvantages of rural life when he said that the first requisite to happiness is that a man be born in a famous city. In the United States, Henry David Thoreau, 1817-1862, who became famous when he attempted to

escape from the evils of industrialism and commercialism by becoming a hermit in the woods near Walden Pond, is alleged to have made the statement, "It makes little difference whether you are committed to a farm or to a county jail."[3/]

Contemporary studies (McKain, 1957; Youmans, 1967) provide documentation of the distressing conditions of life experienced by substantial numbers of older rural persons in the United States. On almost every indicator of well-being the rural aged are more disadvantaged than the urban aged. Characteristically, rural persons, compared with their urban counterparts, have poorer physical and mental health, smaller incomes, more deteriorated housing, fewer opportunities for satisfactory social relationships, more inadequacies in transportation facilities and in social and medical services, and stronger feelings of subjective isolation.

The data from this study also have implications for segmentation along the urban-rural continuum. Greater differences in value orientations have been observed between the urban and rural younger age persons than between the urban and rural older generation. This observation suggests the tendency to widen the urban-rural value "gap." It appears that value systems in the rural area may become more distinct from those in the urban center, an omen not salutary to the welfare of the rural aged. This tendency may be ameliorated somewhat by the migratory patterns of the young rural people as they continue to move to

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[3/]Acknowledgement is made to Calvin Beale.

urban centers. On the other hand, succeeding age cohorts who remain in the rural area may be more sharply differentiated in value orientations from those existing in urban centers.

SUMMARY

This paper has examined selected value orientations of younger and older age strata in two subcultures--one a rural area in the Southern Appalachian Region of the United States and the other a metropolitan center of about 150,000 persons adjacent to but outside the Southern Appalachian Region. A comparison of mean scores on beliefs and outlooks has revealed significant differences between young adults and older persons living in the two subcultures. These differences point to some of the problems and difficulties associated with the more traditional and folk culture existing in the rural area. It must be added that the rural and urban areas studied are not representative of such areas in the United States. It might be interesting to speculate about the differences which might emerge if studies were made comparing the values and beliefs of a variety of rural subcultures with various urban subcultures.

Age strata differences in value orientations suggest some clues about the nature of emerging society in the two areas. The hypothesis suggested in this paper is that the age group differences reflect social and technological changes. There is no doubt that such changes will continue and successive cohorts of aged persons in the two areas will probably reflect these in their values and beliefs. Current information about such changes should be useful to practitioners who are planning programs and services for older people in the areas studied. Present

programs have focused heavily on such problems as income, housing, nutrition, health, and recreational opportunities. While these needs of older persons will continue to be important, additional needs will probably emerge that also are important. Future cohorts of older persons in the two geographical areas probably will be more sophisticated, better educated, have more money, possess better health, and be more active than the present aged. It is probably a safe prediction that these persons will demand more sophisticated programs and services to meet their differing psychological needs, and they also will probably demand a more active voice in determining the specific nature of such programs and services.

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